

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks at a Rally for Senatorial Candidate Martha M. Coakley in Boston, Massachusetts

January 17, 2010

The President. How's it going, Boston? You fired up? Thank you, everybody. Thank you. Fired up! Fired up! First of all, I'm going to let Michelle know you all sang her "Happy Birthday." She'll be pleased to know.

Audience member. We love you!

The President. I love you back. You know I do.

Let me begin by thanking Liz Bonacci for the wonderful introduction. Where did Liz go? There she is. Give her a big round of applause. Nice job. I told Liz on the way out here, I said, "Oh, you're going to be great." She says, "Yeah, I'm going to rock the house." [*Laughter*] She did.

I want to thank Northeastern. Thank you, Northeastern. And President Aoun—President Aoun and his lovely wife, thank you so much for the hospitality. I want to thank Boston mayor, Tom Menino, who's in the house; Governor Deval Patrick; the great senior Senator from this—[*laughter*]
—I know where we are—[*laughter*]
—Massachusetts—the great Commonwealth of Massachusetts, John Kerry. I want to thank Vicki Kennedy and the entire Kennedy family. They have been great friends for so long. To all the outstanding Members of Congress who are in the house today, thank you. And we are so thankful to Pastor Laguerre for reminding us once again of the incredible obligations that we have to help the people of Haiti in this time of extraordinary need.

So it's good to be back in Boston. I love this town. I spent 3 years here stuck in a library, trying to graduate. But I still had a little fun.

Audience member. [*Inaudible*]
—Worcester.

The President. I had a good time in Worcester too. I came back here a few years ago and gave a little speech that turned out pretty well. Something about Boston folks have just always been good to me. Even though I've got to say that I was going to wear my White Sox jacket today.

Audience members. Oooohh!

The President. Come on, now. You want a guy who's loyal to his hometown team. But I love Boston.

And today I've come to talk about one thing. I've come to talk about Tuesday. On Tuesday, you have the unique and special responsibility to fill the Senate seat that you sent Ted Kennedy to fill for nearly 47 years. And I am here to tell you that the person for that job is your attorney general, Martha Coakley.

Now, there's been a lot said in this race about how it's not the Kennedys' seat; it's the people's seat. And let me tell you, the first person who would agree with that was Ted Kennedy. See, the only thing he loved more than the people of this Commonwealth was serving the people of this Commonwealth. He waged a personal battle on behalf of every single one of you, even if you don't know it: for seniors who are living on fixed incomes; for families

struggling to get health coverage for their children; for students who dream of a college education. He fought for the working men and women, whether they were teachers in Pittsfield or longshoremen in New Bedford. Ted Kennedy was always on your side in so many of the battles that led this Commonwealth and this Nation forward.

Now, Martha knows the struggles Massachusetts working families face because she's lived those struggles. Their stories are her story. You heard her. She was raised in North Adams, one of five kids. Her dad owned a small business. Her mother was a homemaker. She worked her way up. Nothing was handed to her. And she became a lawyer, not to cash in, but to give hard-working people a fair shake. She became a lawyer to fight for families like the one she grew up in, families who are the backbone of this Commonwealth and the backbone of this Nation.

And that's what she's done. Look at her record. As a prosecutor, she took on cases most of us don't even want to think about, putting murderers and child abusers away. As attorney general, she took on Wall Street and recovered millions for Massachusetts taxpayers; took on predatory lenders that were taking advantage of Massachusetts families. She went after big insurance companies that misled people into buying coverage only to deny it when they got sick. She went after big polluters who put the health of your family at risk. Time and again, Martha has taken on those who game the system at expense of hard-working, middle class families.

Audience member. Let's go, Martha!

The President. That's the kind of leader the people of Massachusetts need now more than ever. That—you need somebody——

[At this point, there was an interruption in the audience.]

Audience members. Booo!

The President. You need somebody—that's all right. That's all right. No, no, we're doing okay. We're all right. No, no, no, no, we're okay.

Audience members. Martha! Martha! Martha!

The President. I couldn't—I—we're doing fine. Now, listen——

[The audience interruption continued.]

Audience members. Martha! Martha! Martha!

The President. Now, where were we? All right, let's go, everybody. Now, listen. Now more than ever—that's all right. Hold up, everybody. Hold up.

Now more than ever, you don't need just another politician who talks the talk. And you don't need just people yelling at each other. Right now what we need is somebody who's got a proven track record, a leader who has walked the walk, somebody who has fought for the people of Massachusetts every single day. Because I don't need to tell you we're in tough times right now. We're still dealing with an economic crisis unlike any that we've seen since the Great Depression. It's done a lot of damage to so many people. And even before that storm hit with its full fury, middle class families were weathering tough economic times throughout this past decade, working harder and harder just to keep up. So people are frustrated and they're angry, and they have every right to be. I understand. Because progress is slow, and no matter how much progress we make, it can't come fast enough for the people who need help right now, today.

But here's the thing. You know how politics is. At times like this, there are always some who are eager to exploit that pain and anger to score a few political points. There are always folks who think that the best way to solve these problems are to demonize others. And unfortunately, we're seeing some of that politics in Massachusetts today.

Now, I've heard about some of the ads that Martha's opponent's running. He's driving his truck around the Commonwealth—[laughter]—and he says that he'll—he gets you, that he fights for you, that he'll be an independent voice. And I don't know him; he may be a perfectly nice guy. I don't know his record, but I don't know whether he's been fighting for you up until now, but——

Audience members. Noooo!

The President. But here's what I do know, is I do want somebody who's independent. I want a Senator who's always going to put the interests of working folks all across Massachusetts first, ahead of party, ahead of special interests. And here's what I know, is that Martha has done so. She's got a track record of doing so. I know there are things on which she and I disagree. I respect her for that. She doesn't just call herself independent; she has the character to be independent.

So I hear her opponent is calling himself an independent. Well, you've got to look under the hood—[laughter]—because what you learn makes you wonder. Now, if as a legislator he voted with the Republicans 96 percent of the time—96 percent of the time, it's hard to suggest that he's going to be significantly independent from the Republican agenda. When you listen closely to what he's been saying, it's very clear that he's going to do exactly the same thing in Washington.

So, look, forget the ads. Everybody can run slick ads. Forget the truck. [Laughter] Everybody can buy a truck. [Laughter] Here's the question you need to ask yourselves before you go to vote on Tuesday, Massachusetts: When the chips are down, when the tough votes come, on all the fights that matter to middle class families across this Commonwealth, who is going to be on your side?

Audience members. Martha!

The President. That's what this race on Tuesday is all about. When—because it's easy to say you're independent and you're going to bring people together and all that stuff, until you actually have to do it. And when the vote comes on energy, and there's a choice between standing with big oil or fighting for the clean energy jobs of the future, whose side are you going to be on?

Audience members. Martha!

The President. Martha is going to be on your side.

When the vote comes on taxes, and there's a choice between giving more tax breaks to the wealthiest few and corporations that ship American jobs overseas or giving them to the middle class and businesses that create jobs here, who's going to be on your side?

Audience members. Martha!

The President. Let me just say, by the way, because you'll hear a lot of stuff about taxes. You always do, every election. Last year, I kept a campaign promise to cut taxes for 95 percent of working Americans—cut taxes. And these Members of Congress right here voted to cut taxes here in the Commonwealth, not just for individuals, but also for small businesses. We cut

taxes for middle class families. That was part of the Recovery Act. Now, you better check under the hood, because from everything I see, Martha's opponent would have voted against those taxes—he would have voted against those tax cuts—would have voted against those tax cuts.

When it comes to taking on the worst practices of an insurance industry that routinely denies the American people the care they need and leaves too many families one serious illness away from bankruptcy, who's going to be on your side?

Audience members. Martha!

The President. You know she will because she always has. When the vote comes on financial regulatory reform, and the choice is between standing with Wall Street or standing up for commonsense reforms that will protect consumers and protect our economy from future crises, who's going to be on your side?

Audience members. Martha!

The President. Now, we learned the answer to that one this week. Now, keep in mind, Democrats in Congress voted for tax cuts for middle class families and businesses. Now what we're proposing is to make sure that taxpayers get their money back from the rescue that we had to engage in at the beginning of this year, thanks to the bad regulatory policies of the previous administration. And so we asked Martha's opponent what's he going to do. And he decided to park his truck on Wall Street. *[Laughter]*

Now, it was your tax dollars that saved Wall Street banks from their own recklessness, keeping them from collapsing and dragging our entire economy down with them. But today, those same banks are once again making billions in profits and on track to hand out more money in bonuses than ever before, while the American people are still in a world of hurt. Now, we've actually recovered most of your money already, but I don't think most of your money is good enough. We want all our money back. We're going to collect every dime. That's why I proposed a new fee on the largest financial firms, to pay the American people back for saving their skins.

But instead of taking the side of working families in Massachusetts, Martha's opponent's already walking in lockstep with Washington Republicans, opposing that fee, defending the same fat cats who are getting rewarded for their failure. Now, there's a big difference here. It gives you a sense of who the respective candidates are going to be fighting for, despite the rhetoric, despite the television ads, despite the truck. *[Laughter]* Martha's going to make sure you get your money back. She's got your back. Her opponent's got Wall Street's back. Now, let me be clear: Bankers don't need another vote in the United States Senate. They've got plenty.

Audience member. Where's mine?

The President. Where's yours? That's the question.

And it wouldn't just be any vote. We know that on many of the major questions of our day, a lot of these votes are going to—a lot of these measures are going to rest on one vote in the United States Senate. That's why the opponents of change and progress have been pouring money and resources into the Commonwealth, in hopes of promoting gridlock and failure. They want to keep things just as they are.

So I'd think long and hard about getting in that truck with Martha's opponent. *[Laughter]* It might not take you where you want to go. *[Laughter]* And where we don't want

to go right now is backwards to the same policies that got us into this mess in the first place, when we've just started to make progress cleaning it up.

Now, Massachusetts, we have had 1 year to make up for 8. It hasn't been quick. It hasn't been easy. But we've begun to deliver on the change you voted for. I mean, think about it, what some of these Members that I just talked about have done, what we've done just over the last several months. We've started to see the economy grow again. We've given tax cuts to small businesses. We're forcing the banks finally to start lending again on Main Street and not just worry about profits. We've made sure that police officers and teachers and critical workers across this Commonwealth haven't been laid off. But we've got so much more work to do. So many families are out there hurting.

I get 10 letters for—out of the 40,000 that I receive every single day, I select 10 out to read every night. And they're heartbreaking: people talking about losing their jobs, losing their homes. Sometimes it's young children who are writing: "Mr. President, can you help? My dad has lost his job." "Mr. President, can you help? My brother is sick, and we don't have health insurance."

We've got so much work left to do. And as much progress as we've made, I can't do it alone. I need leaders like Martha by my side so we can kick it into high gear, so we can finish what we've started.

You know, we always knew that change was going to be hard. And what we also understood—I understood this the minute I was sworn into office—was that there were going to be some who stood on the sidelines, who were protectors of the big banks and protectors of the big insurance companies, protectors of the big drug companies, who would say, "You know what? We can take advantage of this crisis, because it's going to be so bad, even though we helped initiate these policies, there's going to be a sleight of hand here because we're going to let Democrats take responsibility. We're going to let them make the tough choices. We're going to let them rescue the economy. And then we can tap into that anger and that frustration."

It's the oldest play in the book. But everybody here knows that the choices that have to be made in order to get this economy moving, to make sure that people are actually working in jobs that pay a living wage, that we have a green energy economy that is freeing ourselves from dependence on foreign oil, that young people can actually afford to go to college and can look forward to graduating to careers that are building this country, that those things aren't going to happen overnight and they're not going to be easy. But we sure aren't going to get there if we look backwards and try to reinstitute the same failed policies that we've had over the past decade.

That's not going to work. We've been there; we've done that. What Martha's opponent is preaching, we've already tried, and it didn't work. So understand what's at stake here, Massachusetts. It's whether we're going forward or going backwards.

Audience members. Forward!

The President. It's whether we're going to have a future where everybody gets a shot in this society or just the privileged few. If you were fired up in the last election, I need you more fired up in this election. I need you out there working just as hard right now in those final days. I need you knocking on doors. I need you making phone calls. I need you talking to your friends and your neighbors and telling them what's at stake on Tuesday, that every vote matters, that every voice matters.

And if you do that—if you do that, if you are willing not only to cast your vote for Martha Coakley, but if you're willing to get out the vote for Martha Coakley, then you won't just win this election. You will carry on the best progressive, forward-looking values of this proud Commonwealth and send a leader to Washington who is going to work tirelessly every single day to turn this economy around, to move this country forward, and to keep the American Dream alive in our time and for all time. That's what Martha Coakley's about. And we need you. We need you on Tuesday.

Thank you very much, Boston. Thank you, Northeastern. Thank you, Commonwealth.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:06 p.m. at Northeastern University. In his remarks, he referred to Liz Bonacci, niece of senatorial candidate Coakley, who introduced the President; Joseph E. Aoun, president, Northeastern University, and his wife, Zeina; Victoria R. Kennedy, wife of former Massachusetts Senator Edward M. Kennedy; Pierre Eddy Laguerre, pastor, Philadelphie Haitian American 7th Day Adventist Church, Malden, MA; and State Senator Scott P. Brown, Massachusetts senatorial candidate.

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Names: Aoun, Joseph E.; Aoun, Zeina; Bonacci, Liz; Brown, Scott P.; Coakley, Martha M.; Kennedy, Victoria R.; Kerry, John F.; Laguerre, Pierre Eddy; Menino, Thomas M.; Obama, Michelle; Patrick, Deval L.

Subjects: Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Business and industry : Banks and financial institutions :: Financial Crisis Responsibility Fee, proposed; Business and industry : Corporate executives, compensation packages; Business and industry : Small and minority businesses; Economy, national : American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Energy : Foreign sources; Haiti : Earthquake, damage and recovery efforts; Haiti : U.S. assistance; Housing : Housing market :: Decline; Massachusetts : Democratic Party event; Massachusetts : Governor; Massachusetts : President's visit; Natural disasters : Haiti, earthquake; Taxation : Tax relief; Treasury, Department of the : Troubled Asset Relief Program.

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